The Secrets of the Hohenzollerns

STARTLING EXPOSURE OF INNER LIFE OF KAISER AND CROWN PRINCE AS TOLD BY COUNT ERNST VON HELTZENDORFF TO WILLIAM LEQUEUX

EDITORIAL NOTE. — William LeQueux, who here chronicles for his friend, Count Ernst von Heltzendorff, the latter's revelations of the inner life of the imperial German court, has long been recognized throughout Europe as the possessor of its innermost secrets.

The English "Who's Who" says of him: "He has intimate knowledge of the secret service of Continental countries and is considered by the government (of Great Britain) an authority on such matters." Another authority says: "Few people have been more closely associated with or know more of the astounding inner machinery of Germany than he."

LeQueux probably has more sources of secret information at his command than any contemporary in civil life, and for the last six years the British Government has made valuable use of his vast store of secret information through a specially organized department with which LeQueux works as a voluntary assistant.

Count von Heltzendorff became an intimate of LeQueux several years prior to the outbreak of the war; he has been living in retirement in France since August, 1914, and it was there that LeQueux received from the crown prince's late personal adjutant permission to make public these revelations of the inner life of the Hohenzollerns—that the democracies of the world might come to know the real, but heretofore hidden, personalities of the two dominant members of the autocracy they are now arrayed against.

Trautmann Affair Cause of Trouble

THE Trautmann affair was one which caused a wild sensation at Potsdam in the autumn of 1912. I became implicated in it in a somewhat curious manner.

I chanced to be lunching at the Esplanade in Berlin, chatting with Laroque of the French embassy. Our hostess was Frau Breitenbach, a wealthy Jewess—a woman who came from Dortmund—and who was spending money like water in order to wriggle into Berlin society. As personal adjutant of the crown prince, I was, of course, one of the principal guests, and I suspected that she was angling for a card of invitation to the next ball at the Marmor palace.

Frau Breitenbach was lunching with sixteen guests at one big, round table, her daughter Elise, a very smartly dressed girl of nineteen, seated opposite to her. It was a merry party, including, as it did, some of the most renowned persons in the empire, among them being the imperial chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, and that grand seigneur, who was a favorite at court, the multimillionaire serene highness, Prince Maximilian Egon zu Fuerstenberg. Of the latter it may be said that no man rivaled his influence with the emperor. What he said was law in Germany.

Fuerstenberg was head of the famous "prince's trust," now dissolved, but at that time, with its capital of $500,000,000, it was a great force in the German commercial world. Indeed, such a boon companion was he of the kaiser's that an august but purely decorative and ceremonial place was actually invented for him as colonel marshal of the Prussian court, an excuse to wear a gay uniform and gorgeous decorations, as befitted a man who, possessing a hundred millions, was an important asset to the emperor in his deep-laid scheme for world power.

Young Man Across the Room.

That merry luncheon party was the prologue of a very curious drama. As we chatted I noticed that far across the crowded room, at a table set in a window, there sat alone a dark-haired, sallow, good-looking young civilian, who was eating his lunch in a rather bored manner, yet his eyes were fixed straight upon Elise Breitenbach, as though she exercised over him some strange fascination.

Half a dozen times I glanced across, and on each occasion saw that the young man had no eyes for the notables around the table, his gaze being fixed upon the daughter of the great financier.

Somehow I felt a distinct belief that the young civilian's face was familiar to me. It was not the first time I had seen him, yet I could not recall the circumstances in which we had met.

Two nights later I dined with the Breitenbachs at their fine house in the Alsenstrasse. The only guest besides myself was the Countess von Bassewitz, and after dinner Frau Breitenbach took the countess aside to talk, while I wandered with her daughter into the winter garden, with its high palms and gorgeous exotics, that overlooked the gardens of the Austrian embassy.

When the man had brought us coffee, the pretty Elise commenced to question me about life at the crown prince's court.

"How intensely interesting it must be to be personal adjutant to the crown prince! Mother is dying to get a command to one of the receptions at Potsdam," the girl said. "Only today she was wondering—well, whether you could possibly use your influence in that direction."

In an instant I saw why I had been invited to dinners and luncheons so often.

I reflected a moment. Then I said: "I do not think that will be very difficult. I will see what can be done. But I hope that if I am successful you will accompany your mother."

When I looked in at the court marshal's room in the palace next morning, I scribbled down the name of mother and daughter for cards.

A week later the crown prince and princess gave a grand ball at the Marmor palace at Potsdam, and the emperor himself attended.

Frau Breitenbach, gorgeously attired, made her bow before the all-highest, and her daughter did the same.

I spoke with Elise, and afterward, when I danced with her, I saw how impressed she was by the glitter and glamour of the Potsdam court circle, and by the fact that she was in the presence of the all-highest one. From words she let drop that night as she hung upon my arm, I wondered whether she was really as ingenuous as she pretended. She was, I found, an extremely discreet and clever little person, a fact which further increased my official interest in her.

Questioned by the Emperor.

One night about two months later I had an appointment with Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches theater, in Berlin, to arrange a royal visit there, and after the performance I went back to the palace, prior to retiring to my rooms in the Krausenstrasse. The guards saluted as I crossed the dark courtyard, and having passed through the corridors to the private apartments, I entered with my key the crown prince's locked study.

To my surprise, I found "Willie" seated there with the emperor in earnest discussion.

With apology, I bowed instantly and withdrew, whereupon the kaiser exclaimed:

"Come in, Heltzendorff; I want you."

Then he cast a quick glance at the young man, who had thrown himself in a lazy attitude into a long cane lounge chair. It was as though his majesty was hesitating to speak with me, or asking his son's permission to do so.

"Tell me, Heltzendorff," exclaimed his majesty suddenly, "do you know this person?" and he placed before my gaze a cabinet photograph of the pretty Elise.

"Yes," I answered frankly. "It is Fraulein Breitenbach.

"And what do you know of her?" inquired his majesty. "You introduced her and her mother to court, I believe."

I saw that the emperor had discovered something which annoyed him. What could it be?

At once I was compelled to admit that I had set down their names for invitation, and, further, I explained all that I knew about them.

"You are certain you know nothing more?" asked the emperor. "Understand that no blame attaches to you."

I assured him that I had revealed all that I knew concerning them.

"Hold no further communication with either mother or daughter," his majesty said. "Leave for Paris by the eight o'clock train tomorrow morning, and go to Baron von Steinmetz, the chief of our confidential service in France."

Then, turning to the crown prince, he said: "You have his address."

"Yes," said the younger man. "He is passing as Monsieur Felix Reumont, and is living at 114 bis, Avenue de Neuilly, close to the Pont."

I scribbled the name and address upon the back of an envelope, whereupon his majesty said:

"Carry my verbal orders to Steinmetz, and tell him to act upon the orders I sent him by courier yesterday. And you will assist him. He will explain matters fully when you arrive."

Then, crossing to the crown prince's writing table, his majesty took a large envelope, into which he placed the photograph with several papers, and sealed them with the crown prince's seal.

"Give this to Von Steinmetz from me," his majesty said.

I bowed as I took it from his majesty's hand, my curiosity naturally excited regarding Frau Breitenbach and her daughter. What, I wondered, was in the wind?

"And, Heltzendorff, please report to me," remarked the heir, still lounging lazily in the chair.

Bowing, I took leave of my imperial master, and next morning at eight o'clock, set out upon my mission.

Baron von Steinmetz.

I found the Baron von Steinmetz living in a good-sized house in the Avenue de Neuilly, not far from the bridge. One of the cleverest and most astute officials that Germany possessed, and a man high in the kaiser's favor, he had, in the name of Felix Reumont, purchased, with government funds of course, a cinema theater in the Rue Lafayette, and ostensibly upon the proceeds of that establishment lived comfortably out at Neuilly.

At eleven o'clock in the morning his valet, evidently a German, showed me in.

"I quite understand, my dear Heltzendorff," he said, as he took from the emperor's packet the picture of Fraulein Elise and stood gazing at it. "It is quite plain why you should have been sent by his majesty."

A LETTER FROM THE CROWN PRINCE'S PERSONAL ADJUTANT TO WILLIAM LEQUEUX, POSSESSOR OF THE SECRETS OF EUROPE.

Veneux Nadon,
par Moret-sur-Loing,
Seine-et-Marne,
February 10th, 1917.

My dear LeQueux:

I have just finished reading the proofs of your articles describing my life as an official at the imperial court at Potsdam, and the two or three small errors you made I have duly corrected.

The gross scandals and wily intrigues which I have related to you were many of them known to yourself, for, as the intimate friend of Luisa, the ex-crown princess of Saxony, you were, before the war, closely associated with many of those at court whose names appear in these articles.

The revelations which I have made, and which you have recorded here, are but a tithe of the disclosures which I could make, and if the world desires more, I shall be pleased to furnish you with other and even more startling details, which you may also put into print.

My service as personal adjutant to the German crown prince is, happily, at an end, and now, with the treachery of Germany against civilization glaringly revealed, I feel, in my retirement, no compunction in exposing all I know concerning the secrets of the kaiser and his son.

With most cordial greetings from
Your sincere friend,
(Signed) ERNST VON HELTZENDORFF.

"Why, I don't understand. But his majesty told me that you would explain. The young lady and her mother are friends of mine."

"Exactly. That's just it!" he exclaimed. "You apparently know but little of them—eh?—or you would not call them your friends!"

These words surprised me, but I was the more astounded when he continued:

"You of course know of those disgraceful anonymous letters which have been continually arriving at court—of the emperor's fury concerning them."

I replied in the affirmative, for, as a matter of fact, for the past three months the whole court had been flooded with most abusive and disgraceful correspondence concerning the camarilla that had again sprung up around the kaiser. The emperor, the empress, the crown prince and princess, Prince Eitel, Sophie Caroline, Prince Henry of Prussia and others had received letters, most of them in typewriting, containing the most intimate details of scandals concerning men and women around the emperor.

Fully a dozen of these letters addressed to the crown prince he had handed to me—letters denouncing in some cases perfectly innocent people, destroying the reputations of honest men and women, and abusing the heir to the throne in an outrageous manner.

On at least three occasions "Willie" had shown me letters addressed to the kaiser himself, and intercepted by the kaiserin, who, in consequence of this flood of anonymous epistles that had produced such a terrible sensation at Potsdam, had ordered that all such letters found in the imperial postbag should be handed at once to her.

"The identity of the writer is the point that is engaging my attention," the baron said, as he opened a drawer and drew forth a bundle of quite a hundred letters, adding: "All these that you see here have been addressed either to the emperor or the empress," and he handed me one, which on scanning I saw contained some outrageous statements, allegations which would make the hair of the all-highest bristle with rage.

"Well," I exclaimed, "that certainly is a very interesting specimen of anonymous correspondence."

"Yes, it is!" exclaimed the baron. "In Berlin every inquiry has been made to trace its author. Schunke (head of the detective police) was charged by the emperor to investigate. He did so, and both he and Klewitz failed utterly. Now it has been given into my hands."

A Typical German Investigation.

Presently, when I sat with the baron at his table, he switched on an intense electric light and then spread out some of the letters above a small, square mirror.

"You see they are on various kinds of note paper, bearing all kinds of watermarks, of French, English and German manufacture. Some we have here are upon English paper, because it is heavy and thick. Again, three different makes of typewriter have been used—one a newly invented importation from America. The written letters are, you will see, mostly in a man's hand."

"Yes, I see all that," I said. "But what have you discovered concerning their author? The letter I received bore a French stamp and the postmark of Angers."

He placed before me quite a dozen envelopes addressed to the emperor and empress, all bearing the postmark of that town in the Maine-et-Loire. Others had been posted in Leipzig, Wilhelmshaven, Tours, Antwerp, Berlin, Wilmersdorf and other places.

"The investigation is exceedingly difficult, I can assure you," he said. "I have had the assistance of some of the best scientific brains of our empire in making comparisons and analyses. Indeed, Professor Harbge is with me from Berlin."

A few minutes later the professor himself, an elderly, spectacled man in gray tweeds, entered the room. I knew him and greeted him.

"Sixteen different varieties of paper have been received at the Neues and Marmor palaces," the baron remarked. "Well, I have worked for two months night and day, upon the inquiry. I have discovered that eleven of these varieties of paper can be purchased at a certain small stationer's shop, Lancry's, in the Boulevard Haussmann, close to the Printemps. One paper especially is sold nowhere else in Paris. It is this."

He held over a mirror a letter upon a small sheet of note paper bearing the watermark of a bull's head.

"That paper was made at a mill in the south of Devonshire, in England, destroyed by fire five years ago. Paper of that make cannot be obtained anywhere else in France," he declared.

I at once realized how much patience must have been expended upon the inquiry, and said:

"Then you have actually fixed the shop where the writer purchased his paper?"

"Yes," he replied. "And we know that the newly invented typewriter, a specimen one, was sold by the Maison Audebert, in Marseille. The purchaser of the typewriter in Marseille purchases his paper and envelopes at Lancry's, on the Boulevard Haussmann."

"Splendid!" I said, for it was clear that the baron, with the thousand-and-one secret agents at his beck and call, had been able, with the professor's aid, to fix the source of the stationery. "But," I added, "what is wanted from me?" Why, I wondered, had his majesty sent the baron that photograph of Elise Breitenbach?

"I want you to go with me to the central door of the Printemps at four o'clock this afternoon, and we will watch Lancry's shop across the way," the baron replied.

The Writer of the Letters.

This we did, and from four till six o'clock we stood, amid the bustle of foot passengers, watching the small stationer's on the opposite side of the boulevard, yet without result.

Next day and the next I accompanied the prosperous cinema proprietor upon his daily vigil, but in vain, until his reluctance to tell me the reason why I had been sent to Paris annoyed me considerably.

On the fifth afternoon, just before five o'clock, while we were strolling together, the baron's eyes being fixed upon the door of the small single-fronted shop, I saw him start, and then make pretence of indifference.

"Look!" he whispered.

I glanced across and saw a young man just about to enter the shop.

The figure was unfamiliar, but, catching sight of his face, I held my breath. I had seen that sallow, deep-eyed countenance before.

It was the young man who had sat eating his luncheon alone at the Esplanade, apparently fascinated by the beauty of Elise Breitenbach.

"Well," exclaimed the baron. "I see you recognize him—eh? He is probably going to buy more paper for his scurrilous screeds."

"Yes. But who is he?" I asked. "I have seen him before, but have no exact knowledge of him."

The baron did not reply until we were back again in his house at Neuilly. Then he said:

"That young man, the author of the outrageous insults to his majesty, is known as Franz Seeliger, but he is the disgraced, ne'er-do-well son of General von Trautmann, captain general of the palace guard."

"The son of old Von Trautmann!" I gasped. "Does the father know?"

The baron grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

Then, after I had related to him the incident of the Esplanade, he said:

"That is of greatest interest. Will you return to Berlin and report to the emperor what you have seen here? His majesty has given me that instruction."

The baron told me of his long weeks of patient inquiry and careful watching; of how the young fellow had been followed to Angers and other towns in France where the letters were posted, and of his frequent visits to Berlin. He had entered a crack regiment, but had been dismissed the army for forgery and undergone two years' imprisonment. Afterwards he had fallen in with a gang of clever international hotel thieves, and become what is known as a rat d'hotel. Now, because of a personal grievance against the emperor, who had ordered his prosecution, he seemed to have by some secret means ferreted out every bit of scandal at Potsdam, exaggerated it, invented amazing additions, and in secret sown it broadcast.

His hand would have left no trace if he had not been so indiscreet as to buy his paper from that one shop close to the Rue de Provence, where he had rooms.

The Arrest of General von Trautmann.

On the third night following I stood in the emperor's private room at Potsdam and made my report, explaining all that I knew and what I had witnessed in Paris.

"That man knows a very great deal—but how does he know?" snapped the emperor. "See Schunke early tomorrow," he ordered, "and tell him to discover the link between this young blackguard and your friends the Breitenbachs, and report to me."

Next morning I sat with the astute Schunke at the headquarters of the detective police in Berlin, and there discussed the affair fully, explaining the result of my journey to Paris and what I had seen, and giving him the order from the kaiser.

"But, count, if this woman Breitenbach and her daughter are your friends, you will be able to visit them and glean something," he said.

"I have distinct orders from the emperor not to visit them while the inquiry is in progress," I replied.

Later that same morning I returned to the Marmor palace to report to the crown prince, but found that his highness was absent upon an official visit of inspection at Stuttgart.

In the meantime I several times saw the great detective, Schunke, and found that he was in constant communication with Baron Steinmetz in Paris. The pair were evidently leaving no stone unturned to elucidate the mystery of those annoying letters, which were still falling as so many bombs into the center of the kaiser's court.

Suddenly, one Sunday night, all Berlin was electrified at the news that General von Trautmann, captain general of the palace guard—whom, truth to tell, the crown prince had long secretly hated because he had once dared to utter some word of reproach—had been arrested and sent to a fortress at the emperor's order.

An hour after the arrest his majesty's personal adjutant commanded me by telephone to attend at the Berlin Schloss. When we were alone, the kaiser turned to me and said:

"Count von Heltzendorff, you will say nothing of your recent visit to Paris, or of the authorship of those anonymous letters—you understand? You know absolutely nothing."

Then, being summarily dismissed by a wave of the imperial hand, I retired, more mystified than ever. Why should my mouth be thus closed?

When I returned to my rooms that evening Schunke rang me up on the telephone with the news that my friends the Breitenbachs had closed their house and left early that morning for Brussels.

"Where is Seeliger?" I inquired.

"In Brussels. The Breitenbachs have gone there to join him, now that the truth is out, and his father is under arrest."

The emperor's fury knew no bounds. His mind poisoned against the poor old general, he had fixed upon him as the person responsible for that disgraceful correspondence which for so many weeks had kept the court in constant turmoil and anxiety. Though his majesty was aware of the actual writer of the letters, he would not listen to reason, and openly declared that he would make an example of the silver-haired old captain general of the guard, who, after all, was perfectly innocent of the deeds committed by his vagabond son.

A prosecution was ordered, and three weeks later it took place in camera, the baron, Schunke and a number of detectives being ordered to give evidence. So damning, indeed, was their testimony that the judge passed the extreme sentence of twenty years' imprisonment.

And I, who knew and held proofs of the truth, dared not protest.

Elise Breitenbach.

Where was the general's son—the real culprit and author of the letters? I made inquiry of Schunke, of the baron, and of others who had, at the order of the all-highest, conspired to ruin poor Von Trautmann. All, however, declared ignorance, and yet, curiously enough, the fine house of the Breitenbachs in the Alsenstrasse still remained empty.

About six months after the secret trial of the unfortunate general I had accompanied the crown prince on a visit to the Quirinal, and one afternoon while strolling along the Corso, in Rome, suddenly came face to face with Fraulein Elise Breitenbach.

In delight I took her into Ronzi's, the noted confectioner's at the corner of the Piazza Colonna, and there, at one of the little tables, she explained to me how she and her mother, having become acquainted with Franz Seeliger—not knowing him to be the general's son—they suddenly fell under the suspicion of the Berlin secret police, and, though much puzzled, did not again come to court.

Some weeks later mother and daughter chanced to be in Paris, and one day called at Seeliger's rooms in the Rue de Provence, but he was out. They, however, were shown into his room to wait, and there saw upon his table an abusive and scurrilous typewritten letter in German addressed to the emperor. Then it suddenly dawned upon them that the affable young man might be the actual author of those infamous letters, about which all Berlin knew and was talking. It was this visit which, no doubt, revealed to the baron the young man's hiding place. Both mother and daughter, however, kept their own counsel, met Seeliger next day, and watched, subsequently learning, to their surprise, that he was the son of General von Trautmann, and, further, that he had as a friend one of the personal valets of the emperor, from whom, no doubt, he obtained his inside information about persons at court.

"When his father was arrested we knew that the young man was living in Brussels, and at once went there in order to induce him to come forward, make confession, and so save the general from disgrace," said the pretty girl seated before me. "On arrival we saw him alone, and told him what we had discovered in the Rue de Provence, whereupon he admitted to us that he had written all the letters, and announced that he intended to return to Berlin next day and give himself up to the police in order to secure his father's release."

"And why did he not do so?" I asked.

"Because next morning he was found dead in his bed in the hotel."

Fearing the emperor's wrath, the Breitenbachs, like myself, dared not reveal what they knew—the truth, which is here set down for the first time—and, alas! poor General von Trautmann died in prison at Mulheim last year.

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BUILT FOR KING'S DAUGHTER

Famous French Road Constructed by Louis XV to Render Travel More Easy.

The high road running along the edge of the plateau of Craonne, France, frequently mentioned in the official communiques during the second battle of the Aisne, and which is going down to history under the name of the "Chemin des Dames," (the ladies' way), dates from the time of Louis XV.

This road, beginning at the Paris-Maubeuge road, about ten miles northeast of Soissons, crosses the plateau of Craonne, a distance of about twelve miles, then descends into the valley of the Ailette to cross the Vauclerc woods to the domain of the ancient chateau of Dove, near Bouconville, where the Princess Adelaide, Sophie and Victoire, daughters of Louis XV, visited one of their ladies of honor, Mme. de Narbonne, every summer.

The roads of the region were detestable. Out of consideration for the princesses a new paved road was built along the crest of the plateau and from that fact it derives the name of the "Chemin des Dames."

Joe Rendall of Lyndonville was badly poisoned recently by a mosquito bite, which caused the arm to swell and necessitated bandaging.